



US Army Corps
of Engineers
New England District

Designation of a Long-Term Dredged Material Disposal Site for Rhode Island Region

Project Information



Environmental
Protection Agency
New England Region

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Background

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have been asked by the state of Rhode Island and the U.S. Congress to designate one or more long-term disposal sites in the Rhode Island region for dredged material. The Corps received funding from the Congress to begin the evaluation process in the fall of 2000. The process will include scoping meetings in which the public and federal and state agencies will be asked to identify issues to be considered in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the site(s). This fact sheet provides background information about the process and the effort.

How does this effort relate to the Providence River and Harbor Maintenance Dredging Project?

The Corps of Engineers issued a draft EIS for maintenance dredging of the federal navigation channel in the Providence River and upper Narragansett Bay in August of 1998. The public provided comments on the draft and the Corps has been conducting in-depth studies to address the public's concerns and prepare the final EIS. Work on the Providence River and Harbor Maintenance Dredging Project final EIS will continue while work on a separate site designation EIS begins. The Corps will select a site or sites for use by the Providence River dredging project and for applicants who have submitted applications to be considered for the site selected for that project. Sites that were evaluated in the Providence River project will be included in the evaluation process for this EIS.

What is the difference between site selection and site designation?

Site designation is the process whereby dredged material disposal sites in ocean waters are authorized for long-term use. Site selection involves a similar process, but is only for short-term use. The authority to designate ocean disposal sites for long-term use rests with the EPA under the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act (MPRSA). Under the same act, the Corps of Engineers shares authority with the EPA for the management and regulation of dredged material disposal in open water, but only the

EPA can designate sites in ocean waters. The authority to select ocean disposal sites for short term use rests with the Corps of Engineers.

Disposal of dredged material in ocean waters falls within the authority of the MPRSA. Under the MPRSA, the Corps of Engineers has authority to issue permits for dredged material disposal and select sites on a project by project basis for dredged material disposal, whereas the EPA retains veto authority over such permits or selections.

Disposal at a site selected by the Corps is limited to five years. Use of the site may be extended for an additional five years under certain circumstances. Within the allowed time period, there are no limitations on how often the site can be used after it is selected, assuming its capacity is not exceeded.

What is the process for long-term disposal site designation?

To designate a long-term site, the Corps of Engineers and EPA would cooperate in the preparation of a new site designation EIS. The EIS would consider the long-term impacts of disposal at the sites identified during the scoping meetings and will evaluate alternative disposal sites and methods. Unlike the Providence River EIS, which focuses on the effects of dredging and disposal of one specific project, the site designation EIS would focus on the dredging needs of the entire area that the site would serve.

Why does the Rhode Island Region need a long-term disposal site for dredged material?

The lack of open water disposal sites in the region has lead to severe shoaling of many marinas, berths and channels in Rhode Island and southeastern Massachusetts. Based on the latest survey of the Providence River, 4.3 million cubic yards of sediment must be removed to restore the Congressionally authorized 40-foot depth of the Providence River channel alone. This volume of material would cover about 160 acres 20 feet deep. The need for dredging and dredged material disposal extends to federal and private ports and marinas throughout the state. Availability of a feasible designated disposal site

would facilitate meeting navigation infrastructure needs over a long period of time.

Who would use the site?

If a site is selected or designated, either public or government entities could seek approvals for disposal at the site. The Corps of Engineers would be responsible for issuing permits to dispose of suitable material at the site. Permits could be issued for material that does not exceed the capacity of the site, and for which the need for open water disposal had been established under the law and regulations. As required under the MPRSA, each project proposed for disposal at the site will need to meet strict sediment testing and discharge requirements before a permit can be issued. Each applicant must also provide a clear demonstration of the need for ocean disposal through an assessment of alternatives.

Can't something other than open water disposal be done with the material?

The Corps and the EPA are exploring alternative technologies to treat or reuse the material, but so far we have not uncovered a process to economically treat or reuse large volumes of fine material. The Corps and the EPA will continue to explore alternative technologies; however, the need for a site to accommodate large-scale disposal of dredged material is likely to continue into the foreseeable future. Waterborne shipping is efficient and essential to the economic well being of the state. For instance, one ship can move the equivalent of 6,000 semi-trailer trucks.

Do other regions have designated long-term disposal sites?

Yes. Maine and Massachusetts, as well as most other states along the east coast have designated long-term disposal sites within or adjacent to state waters. Currently an EIS is being prepared to evaluate one or more sites in the Long Island Sound Region.

If a long-term site is designated in the Rhode Island Region, what types of material can be placed there?

Only dredged material that meets EPA testing and discharge criteria would be disposed at a site designated in open water. The dredged material would have to undergo rigorous testing following the set of national test procedures developed by the EPA and the Corps of Engineers. The testing includes measuring the concentrations of various contaminants in the sediments, their potential to be

released into the water, and their effects on marine organisms. Material that does not meet the requirements of the regulations is considered unsuitable for ocean disposal and must be disposed of at an alternative location.

How can I get involved in the site designation process?

The first opportunity to get involved will be at the public scoping meetings where you will have the opportunity to voice your opinion and help shape the scope of the EIS. Public forums will be held throughout the development of the EIS to give the public the opportunity to be involved in the process as information is developed for the EIS. We are committed to working with the citizens of Rhode Island and Massachusetts and all of the industry, economic and environmental interest groups to address the commercial shipping and recreational boating needs of the region while minimizing impacts to the environment and aquatic habitat.

How can I learn more about disposal site designation?

Information about the site designation process will be placed on the New England District internet homepage: <http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/ridredging.htm> or you may call the project manager, Mike Keegan, at (978) 318-8087. The homepage will be updated periodically to display the latest information about this effort. In addition, further information on the EPA ocean disposal program may be found on EPA's web address: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/dmmp/index.html>